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Texas faces shortage of oil and gas well inspectors

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Hundreds of thousands of Texas' oil and gas wells have not been inspected for five years due to a severe shortage of inspectors.

The inadequate supervision increases the risk of leaks, spills and other significant hazards.

Just 158 inspectors are currently responsible for monitoring 435,000 wells, according to the Texas Railroad Commission, which regulates the state's oil and gas industry.

Further complicating the matter, the RRC must also grapple with antiquated computer systems that make it nearly impossible to track past violations by owners of wells.

Data about past violations are stored on a 40-year-old system that is difficult to use without knowledge of mainframe computers. As a result, the data remain largely inaccessible to commissioners, employees and the public.

"We are nowhere near where we'd like to be," said Kim Corley, executive director of the RRC. "We can produce reports out of the mainframe, but it's not web-based, it's not instantaneous, and it's kind of clunky."

Looking ahead, the commission is seeking a special appropriation of about \$45 million from the Legislature to hire more inspectors and upgrade its technology, among other endeavors (Ryan Maye Handy, *Houston Chronicle*, Feb. 7). — MJ

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